



## CASE STUDY

# Putting Region on the Ecotourism Map

### Public-private initiative boosts longtime efforts to develop ecotourism



Photo: Chemonics/Lean Garcia

Dominican children from the town of Barahona planted sea grapes along the Birán River as part of USAID's ecotourism cluster project there to help clean up the rivers and towns in key tourism regions.

***USAID helped a community recognize its national parks and biodiversity could be tapped to support and market a sustainable ecotourism industry.***

Telling Our Story  
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### Challenge

Barahona is one of the Dominican Republic's poorest regions, with an unemployment rate exceeding 26% and an illiteracy rate of 16%. A viable tourism industry is one of the few alternatives for the area to significantly alleviate poverty. Despite its rich biodiversity and beautiful national parks, the region lacked a clear vision, as well as community cohesiveness. This resulted in exploitation of natural resources, a shortage of public and private sector dialogue, inability to promote local hotels and restaurants, and failure to secure investment.

### Initiative

A USAID program brought the public and private sectors together to form the Barahona Ecotourism Cluster. For the first time, the mayor, governor, large commercial companies, small businesses, non-governmental organizations, local universities, and other segments of civil society worked together in support of the region's sustainable ecotourism development. USAID helped create a vision and a concrete strategy for Barahona's future that focused on increasing leadership roles of local small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), strengthening community linkages, developing marketing tools, reopening the local airport, and increasing the quality of tourism services while conserving natural resources.

### Results

Today, significant progress has put Barahona on the map as an ecotourism destination. SMEs are collaborating to market the region, producing its first tourism map, comprehensive guide, and excursion packages. Investment that had been stalled for a decade is moving forward. More than 1,000 volunteers from the community cleaned up the Birán River, which runs through the center of the town of Barahona. With a new vision for its future, a clear action plan, conservation programs, new cluster-inspired public sector commitments and donations from large local and international companies in place, the community recognizes sustainable ecotourism as a realistic engine for future job creation and rising incomes.